Rural Child Care Project
Canada/British Columbia Strategic Initiative:
Improved Access to Child Care

Summative Evaluation Report

March, 1999

Rivers & Associates

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Executive Summary

- The Rural Child Care Project was established to respond to the child care needs of migrant and resident farm workers in the South Okanagan/Similkameen region. During peak harvesting periods, many of these workers spend long hours in fields and orchards. Most child care facilities do not offer the extended hours of care these workers would need in order to be able to take advantage of seasonal work opportunities. Without child care, some families would take their children into the fields and orchards with them, while others would be unable to participate in seasonal employment.
- To respond to these needs, the Rural Child Care Project provided a group child care program during July and August for three summers. The child care program was open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., five days a week. It provided care for children from 0 to twelve years of age, in multi-age groupings, enabling siblings to remain together. The service was available in Osoyoos for three years, and in Oliver during the third year. Twenty additional child care spaces were provided through the project each summer. In addition, during the third year, the project enabled an existing child care centre to extend its hours of operation, increase its child care spaces, and expand the age range for which it provided care.
- This extended hour child care service was provided at provincial child care subsidy rates, in order to make it affordable for parents who typically earn low incomes. It also provided three meals and two snacks for $30 a month. The project also assumed an active role in encouraging parents to apply for the provincial child care subsidy. It provided information and assistance application forms, it clarified eligibility issues relating to self-employed and seasonal workers, and it distributed subsidy packages to parents. Since most parents qualified for the subsidy, the project's child care service was very affordable.
- It was not, however, a financially viable operation. The experience of the pilot project indicates that considerably higher costs are incurred in the delivery of extended hour child care. Higher

staffing costs result not only from the additional hours during which child care is provided, but also from the need to satisfy Licensing requirements relating to staffing ratios and qualifications for different age groups, as well as the need to satisfy Employment Standards requirements relating to length of work days. Food costs are also higher since the children need three meals a day.

- The current rate structure for the provincial child care subsidy does not adequately recognize the additional costs associated with the provision of child care for extended hours. Rates paid for twelve hours of care are the same as those for five hours of care. The subsidy is paid for a maximum of 20 days per month, regardless of the actual number of child care days provided in a month. This leads to the conclusion that if seasonal, extended hour child care is to be provided at provincial child care subsidy rates, supplementary sources of funding will be required.
- In order to provide its summer child care program, the pilot project obtained additional government funding, and solicited donations of funds, materials, and time from individuals, community organizations and businesses. It also benefited from its involvement in the hub model adopted by its sponsoring agency. This enabled the project to borrow toys and equipment from other programs also delivered by the sponsoring agency.
- The project took steps to encourage family child care providers to offer extended hours of care by establishing the Family Child Care Supplement. This provides $2.50 for each hour beyond eight hours for licensed family child care providers.
- The project encountered challenges in its attempts to address multicultural child care issues among intended client groups. It made only very slow progress in its attempts to encourage South Asian families to use child care instead of taking their children with them to their work sites. Persistent outreach efforts, combined with translated materials, interpretation services, informal contacts, and use of South Asian staff appear helpful. The project had also anticipated that the migrant and primarily French Canadian fruit pickers would benefit from child care services; however, during the pilot period, very few if any of these workers were accompanied by children.
- Flexibility in application of licensing regulations was found to be important to support the successful implementation of short term extended hour child care. The project worked closely with Licensing staff to ensure that the project met the intent of relevant regulations, and was implemented in a manner which recognized budget and time frame limitations.

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Project Overview

Child Care Strategic Initiative

On April 1 1995, the Governments of Canada and British Columbia launched *Improved Access to Child Care*, a four year, $32 million, cost-shared agreement. This agreement forms part of the federal Strategic Initiatives Program, which was established to pilot test new and innovative ways to reform Canada's social security system.

British Columbia is the only province in Canada to develop a child care initiative through Strategic Initiatives. The *Improved Access to Child Care* Strategic Initiative is designed to pilot and evaluate innovative child care delivery models which will help to inform federal and provincial governments about the role of child care in the social security system.

British Columbia developed the *Improved Access to Child Care* Strategic Initiative in the belief that by addressing the child care needs of working and student parents, job and educational opportunities will be more accessible for parents. To effectively work or study outside the home, parents require high quality, affordable and accessible child care. From this perspective, child care is a critical means of strengthening the economy and reform the social security system.

Since 1992, British Columbia has been working with families, caregivers and communities to develop a strategy that encourages more quality, affordable, accessible child care. Projects funded through *Improved Access to Child Care* support this overall provincial direction, as well as the principles and objectives of the federal/provincial agreement. Services developed and programs enhanced through the *Improved Access to Child Care* Strategic Initiative were designed to be consistent with the overall direction for child care services in British Columbia. Each project funded through the Strategic Initiative was intended to address at least one of the following core objectives:

- to improve the stability and quality of facilities and services;
- to increase the affordability for parents;
- to increase the availability of services and promote parental choice in the selection of the most appropriate child care arrangements for their families.

Rural Child Care Project

The Rural Child Care Project was established to develop and provide child care which would address the unique needs of seasonal workers. Its general intent is to improve the accessibility, affordability and quality of child care in rural areas where a lack of child care may prevent parents from participating in the seasonal workforce. This pilot project focuses specifically on the migrant and resident workers in the fruit industry in the South Okanagan and Similkameen Valley regions. The project was proposed by the Penticton and District Community Resources Society, which also administers the Child Care Resource and Referral for the area.

The Okanagan/Similkameen area is one which has been characterized by a scarcity of child care spaces. The relatively few licensed facilities were often fully utilized, and in some communities were unable to meet local demand for child care. Moreover, there were two additional client groups in the area for whom usual forms of child care were largely inaccessible due to the specific nature of their child care needs. These groups included the mostly migrant fruit pickers, and the resident farm families.

The migrant fruit pickers come into the Okanagan/Similkameen region during the late June to October period to help harvest local fruit crops. They are fairly transient, often camping in or near orchards or in public camp grounds, and moving from one part of the region to another as different crops ripen. Many of the migrant fruit pickers speak French or Spanish as their first language, and have little or no fluency in English. When the weather is good, they work long hours, but work schedules are less predictable under less favourable weather and crop conditions. They are generally paid at minimum wage levels. These workers need child care that is affordable, available for extended hours during

seasonal periods, and provided in locations and on days when work is available. Their lack of fluency in English means that child care information should be provided in appropriate languages and at appropriate literacy levels.

Many of the resident farm families also have little or no fluency in English. Common home languages are Punjabi, Hindi, and Portuguese; and illiteracy rates are high During peak periods, and under favourable weather and crop conditions, many family members will work long hours. The need for extended hours of care during seasonal periods, and the low levels of fluency in English make it difficult for these families to access the more common forms of child care. Moreover, some families may be reluctant to use child care facilities because of cultural traditions that children should always be with a parent and/or that a parent or other extended family member should be responsible for child care.

As a result of these various situations and barriers, farm workers and migrant fruit pickers have often taken their children with them to their work sites. The effort involved in having to take care of children while working means that children are less likely to be properly supervised, and/or that parents are less likely to get as much work done. Moreover, farms and orchards can be particularly hazardous for children, due to the use of pesticides and herbicides, various types of vehicles and machinery, and the extreme summer heat which is common in the area.

To address the child care needs of migrant and resident farm workers, the Penticton and District Community Resources Society proposed to deliver quality child care which would be affordable, available during extended hours and on a seasonal basis, and which would be culturally sensitive and inclusive for all children. Having access to this form of child care was expected to improve parents' ability to take advantage of seasonal work opportunities, while providing a safe environment and developmentally appropriate activities for their children.

The pilot project anticipated that it could arrange for delivery of the needed child care services through the recruitment of licensed family child care providers, and through expanded use of group child care facilities. Recruitment of prospective family child care providers willing to provide extended hours of care on a seasonal basis proceeded with varying levels of success in different communities. However, delays in obtaining responses to requests for criminal record checks meant that many of the recruited family child care providers could not be screened in time to be included in the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) registry during the initial year. This led to a considerable decline in the number of prospective caregivers who remained interested in the project.

The project has instead relied on the provision of group child care to meet the needs of seasonal workers. It has offered group child care during peak summer periods in each of three years. During the first two years, this service was delivered in Osoyoos, and in the third year it was delivered in both Osoyoos and Oliver. In each case, child care was available for twelve-hour days, five days a week, at the provincial child care subsidy rate. Care was provided for children from 0 to 12 years of age, in multi-age groupings, so that siblings could be kept together. The pilot project has also been able to provide child care to children with additional support needs; however, it has had only limited success in reaching various cultural groups in the area, in particular the South Asian community.

Since its first year, the pilot project has not attempted to meet the need for seasonal, extended hours child care through the recruitment of family child care providers. It has, however, continued to support the efforts of the CCRR to recruit new caregivers by providing space for a full time CCRR worker and

for training, etc., and by making its toy lending library available for use by caregivers in the area.

In addition to its provision of seasonal child care, the pilot project has also served as a resource on rural child care issues. Community groups and members use its board room facilities for meetings, and have access to mail, message, fax and photocopy services through the project office. Pilot project staff help parents prepare child care subsidy applications, and have distributed subsidy packages to local parents. Project staff also obtain and distribute information on the Rural Child Care Project, and on rural child care in general.

The pilot project's experience has produced a wealth of information about the difficulties involved in trying to provide child care which is high quality, for multi-age groupings, seasonal, affordable, open extended hours, inclusive, and culturally sensitive. It has identified financial, systemic, and cultural factors which conspire against the provision of child care to meet the unique needs of these seasonal workers.

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Methodology

A draft evaluation framework was established for the Rural Child Care Project shortly after project approval. Staff of the Ministry of Women's Equality (then responsible for child care issues) met with pilot project stakeholders to review the draft and make modifications so as to more accurately capture the project's activities and services. The framework included plans for formative, process and outcome evaluation phases, as well as a requirement for ongoing monitoring of project data.

This summative evaluation is based on information obtained through the following sources and activities:

- *Examination of Project Documentation*: This includes a review of background documentation such as the proposal on which the project was based, the project work plan, quarterly and monthly project reports, budget and quarterly utilization statements, etc.
- *Examination of Project Data*: This includes a review and analysis of data reported by the project on its caregiver recruitment efforts. Caregiver recruitment data have been reported since July 1996; however, the reporting format has changed somewhat over time, partly in response to Ministry requests, and partly to improve consistency with internal project reporting. Available data on the project's role as a regional child care resource was also reviewed.
- *Review of Parent Survey Results*: During the first year of the pilot, a survey was conducted of parents who used the summer child care program provided by the Rural Child Care Project. Although most parents responded, the actual numbers are quite low; 14 out of 19 parents returned questionnaires. However, the survey provides a profile of parents using the service, their reasons for doing so, and their satisfaction with the summer program.
- *Review of Previous Evaluation Reports*: Ministry staff have completed interim (December 1996) and process (May 1998) evaluation reports on the Rural Child Care Project. These were

based on information obtained through interviews and an analysis of data reported by the project.

- *Project/Agency Staff Interviews*: Both in-person and telephone interviews have been conducted with pilot project staff and with the agency manager responsible for the project. An in-person interview was conducted during an on-site visit to the pilot project in July 1998. This interview with the agency manager, the pilot project coordinator, and the CCRR coordinator was used to obtain detailed information on the project, and to explore how and why the pilot project had evolved since the initial proposal. It also provided an opportunity for review of the pilot project from the perspective of the framework which was developed during 1998 for the summative evaluation of the Strategic Initiative on *Improved Access to Child Care*. Subsequent telephone contacts with the agency manager responsible for the project, and with the project coordinator have served to provide clarification on various aspects of the pilot project.

Project Outcomes

This section focuses on outcomes of the Rural Child Care Project. As specified in the summative evaluation framework for the Strategic Initiative on *Improved Access to Child Care*, the assessment of project outcomes is addressed at three levels:

- outcomes specific to the individual pilot project
- outcomes for regional delivery models/community demonstration projects
- outcomes related to the Strategic Initiative on *Improved Access to Child Care*

Material in this section has been organized around these three levels of outcomes, and includes consideration of the issues and questions identified in the summative evaluation framework.

Individual Pilot Project

Outcomes specific to the Rural Child Care Project are considered in relation to pilot project objectives, rationale, design and delivery. This includes an assessment of . . .

- the extent to which the pilot project has been able to achieve its established objectives;
- the project rationale, focusing on the extent to which it has been able to meet the needs of its intended client group;
- project design and delivery issues including project strengths and weaknesses, and the roles and responsibilities of project partners.

Achievement of Project Objectives

The work plan evolving out of the proposal which served as the basis for the Rural Child Care Project indicates that the pilot project's general intent is to . . . *"work collaboratively in the community to improve the accessibility, affordability and quality of child care services in the South Okanagan/Similkameen as well as ensure a more effective and inclusive system for child care in*

British Columbia". This general intent has been translated by the pilot project's contract schedule of services into two goals and six intended outcomes. These are outlined below, followed by a discussion of each of the intended outcomes.

The goals of the Rural Child Care Project are . . .

- to improve the accessibility, affordability and quality of child care services for children and families in rural communities where the lack of child care is a barrier to families abilities to participate in the seasonal workforce;
- to ensure that the Rural Child Care Project is responsive to the unique needs of seasonal workers in the South Okanagan/Similkameen region of the province of British Columbia, recognizing that seasonal workers require extended hour care, short-term care, high quality care provided by child care professionals; affordable care for people who earn minimum wage; inclusive care for all children; culturally sensitive care.

The intended outcomes specified for the Rural Child Care Project are . . .

- an increase in high quality child care spaces in the South Okanagan/Similkameen;
- a delivery model which will address the non-traditional child care needs of rural communities and allow more stability for farm workers;
- an increase in services to ethnic communities;
- an increased local, provincial and federal awareness of rural child care issues;
- an increase of child care subsidy use in the region;
- a decreased use of income assistance during the months of July, August, September and October.

Intended Outcome:	*an increase in high quality child care spaces in the South Okanagan/ Similkameen*

The Okanagan/Similkameen region has historically had a scarcity of child care spaces. In communities like Osoyoos where an influx of tourists and fruit pickers results in a doubling of the population during summer months, existing facilities have been unable to meet demand. The Rural Child Care Project attempted to improve this situation through direct recruitment of caregivers to provide licensed family child care for seasonal workers, and through the provision of support for the CCRR's recruitment efforts.

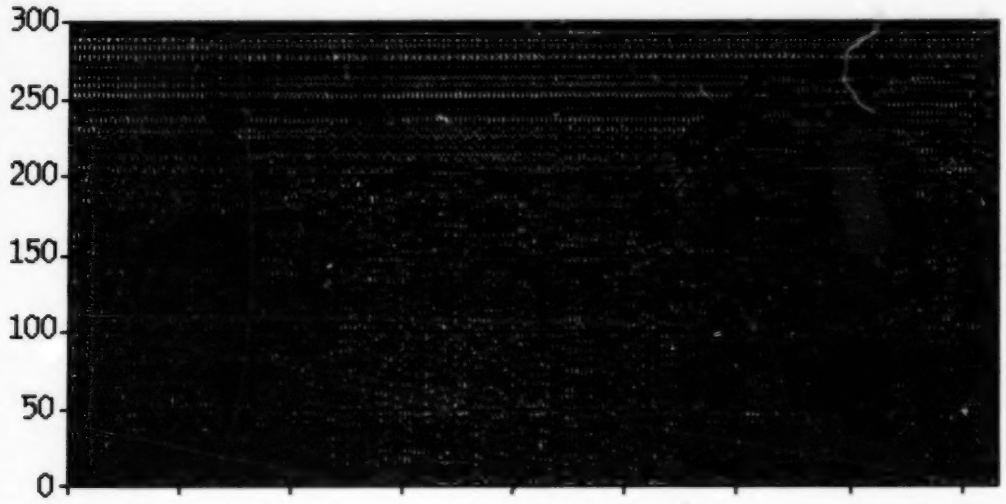
The pilot project initially attempted to recruit caregivers through the use of town meetings; however this proved unproductive as attendance was very low. Project staff then turned to the use of newspaper advertisements, which resulted in a better response. The project had initially intended to use family child care providers to deliver extended-hour child care for seasonal workers during the summer. To this end, project staff had started the screening process for recruited caregivers, and had requested criminal record checks. Unfortunately, responses to these requests were delayed, with the result that applications could not be approved in time for the summer child care program. Many of the prospective child care providers recruited during that first year subsequently lost interest in the project.

Since then, the project has focused on supporting the efforts of the CCRR to recruit new caregivers. It

shares advertisements with the CCRR for prospective caregivers, it provides space so that a CCRR staff member can be located in the Rural Child Care Project office in Osoyoos on a full time basis, it provides space for caregiver training, and it makes its toy lending library available for the CCRR worker in the South Okanagan.

At the commencement of the pilot project, there were 178 licensed child care spaces in the combined communities of Osoyoos, Okanagan Falls, Oliver, Keremeos, Cawston, Hedley and Olalla. During the pilot project period, the total number of licensed spaces in these communities has gradually increased to 273 by mid-1998, and then declined slightly to 258 by September 1998. This pattern is depicted in the figure below.

Total Child Care Spaces



Most of the child care spaces in this area are in group facilities; on average, group child care spaces represent about 60% of the total number of spaces. This fluctuates somewhat over time, and from one community to another.

With respect to the pilot project's intended outcomes, it is clear that there has been an increase in the number of licensed child care spaces in the area during the pilot project period. The link with licensing provides assurance that caregivers must meet required standards and are subject to inspections. The combined result is consistent with the project's intended outcome: an increase in high quality child care spaces in the South Okanagan/Similkameen.

Pilot project staff have put considerable effort into supporting the recruitment efforts of the CCRR, and have also been responsible for increases in the number of seasonal child care spaces in Osoyoos and Oliver. However, it is not possible to determine to what extent the observed increase in licensed child care spaces is attributable to the pilot project, or to a combination of pilot project and other recruitment efforts, and/or other factors.

Intended Outcome:	*a delivery model which will address the non-traditional child care needs of rural communities and allow more stability for farm workers*

The project goals indicate that in order to be responsive to the needs of seasonal workers, child care provided through the pilot project should recognize that seasonal workers require:

- extended-hour care;
- short term care;
- high quality care provided by child care professionals;
- affordable care for people who earn minimum wage;
- inclusive care for all children;
- culturally sensitive care.

In each of the three summers during the pilot period, the Rural Child Care Project provided child care to meet these needs.

Both *extended-hour* and *short term care* were characteristic of the summer programs. The group child care centres were open during July and August, and from 7a.m. to 7 p.m. This short term, two-month period provides access to child care during a large part of the peak fruit harvesting season, and the twelve-hour days enable parents to take advantage of employment available on an extended work day basis.

Seasonal child care was available in Osoyoos during each of the three summers, and in Oliver during the summer of 1998. During 1996 and 1997, the Osoyoos summer program provided 20 child care spaces for children 0 to 12 years of age. The program was located in a church basement; with toys and equipment supplied through the pilot project, the CCRR, and the Penticton Teen Parent Centre (which was not operational during the summer).

During 1998, the summer program in Osoyoos was delivered in partnership with the recently opened Osoyoos Child Care Centre. The Rural Child Care Project expanded the regular services of the Osoyoos Child Care Centre by adding 10 group child care spaces and 8 infant/toddler spaces, and by extending child care hours to a twelve-hour day. The 1998 summer program in Oliver was located in a church hall, with toys and equipment supplied by the pilot project, the CCRR, and the Penticton Teen Parent Centre. It was licensed for 20 spaces, for children aged 0 to 12 years.

It should perhaps be noted that there was demand to keep the group child care open on weekends as well as weekdays, and to extend the service into September and October. However, project staff determined that the costs for Monday to Friday operation were beyond the available budget, ruling out the possibility of Saturday and Sunday service. Similarly, to deliver the summer program during July and August, the project relied in part on staff, toys and equipment from the Teen Parent Centre. These were not available after the end of August, since the Teen Parent Centre re-opened in September.

To deliver *high quality care provided by child care professionals*, the pilot project focused on care within a licensed environment. The program was staffed at the levels and qualifications specified by licensing authorities. This included having a licensed Early Childhood Educator and a licensed Infant/Toddler Educator as part of the summer program staff.

Although the pilot project was successful in hiring professional child care staff for its each of its summer programs, it has not been easy to do so. This is due in part to a relative shortage of qualified child care professionals in the area. Moreover, the twelve hour days meant that the summer program

needed access to two full shifts of child care workers at the required qualification levels. Even when the required staff could be found, it was often difficult to retain them when vacillating enrollments and part, full time and extended hour attendance made it difficult to predict when staff would be needed, and for how many hours during each day.

To ensure that it delivered *affordable care for people who earn minimum wage*, the pilot project charged fees at the child care subsidy level. This meant that parents qualifying for the full subsidy would have the full amount of their child care costs covered. Other child care providers in the area typically charge an amount 10% to 20% above the subsidy level. As will be noted in a subsequent section, project staff put considerable effort into supporting parents to apply for the child care subsidy.

In order to provide *inclusive care for all children*, the pilot project obtained donations from its sponsoring agency and from other community organizations in order to hire a special needs worker. This enabled the pilot project to provide care for several children with high support needs, and in one case, enabled a child with special needs to attend the child care centre with his brother.

Steps taken to provide *culturally sensitive care* include hiring child care staff from the region's South Asian and Spanish communities. During the initial two years of the summer program, the project experienced difficulty attracting children or staff of various ethnic backgrounds. However, project staff persisted with advertising, presentations, and word of mouth efforts intended to provide information about child care, and to learn more about child care preferences and needs of the different cultural groups in the area.

For the 1998 summer child care program, the project succeeded in hiring staff reflecting the cultural make-up of the region. Two South Asian women were hired in 'responsible adult' positions, one in Osoyoos, and one in Oliver; one of these women had completed the CCRR caregiver training. Also, the Osoyoos Child Care Centre hired two child care assistants with Spanish backgrounds, one of whom had been a kindergarten teacher in Mexico, while the other had been a child care worker in El Salvador. Both women had also completed the CCRR caregiver training.

Intended Outcome:	*an increase in services to ethnic communities*

Documents supporting development of the Rural Child Care Project note the wide array of ethnic backgrounds represented among both the migrant fruit pickers and resident farm families in the South Okanagan/Similkameen. For many of these workers, Portuguese, Punjabi, Hindi, and French are more common as home languages than is English. For many too, it appeared that child care either was not accessible, or was not used for other reasons.

The pilot project undertook several activities intended to ensure that the various ethnic communities in the area were aware of, and felt comfortable using available child care options. These activities included the following:

- arranged for Punjabi and French translations of a brochure on the Rural Child Care Project; advertized the service in a Punjabi information directory;
- assisted in creating a poster on child care in French, Punjabi, Spanish, and Mandarin, (with the Ministry for Children and Families and Early Childhood Multicultural Services); distributed the poster among the multi-ethnic communities in the South Okanagan/Similkameen region to improve awareness of the pilot project and the CCRR;

- hired on call French, Spanish, and Punjabi translators to make contacts with ethnic communities and to provide translation services; translated information on child care and on child care subsidy; offered translation services and responded to requests from parents, Oliver Ministry for Children and Families, and Penticton Public Health
- made presentations to English as a Second Language Classes in Oliver to explain the pilot project, opportunities as caregivers, and importance of child care; several students subsequently enrolled in the CCRR caregiver training;
- contacted, met with several multi-ethnic resource services for information and assistance on issues such as translation services, provision of multicultural child care, the Surrey Farm Workers' Child Care Project, recruitment strategies for caregiver training in Punjabi, etc.; these included contacts with the Surrey CCRR, the Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society, Early Childhood Multicultural Services, and a representative of the local South Asian community; and
- recruited child care staff for the Osoyoos and Oliver summer programs from the South Asian and Spanish communities.

Although it is clear from the preceding list that pilot project staff have attempted in many different ways, and on an ongoing basis, to increase services to the ethnic communities in the South Okanagan/Similkameen, actual progress has been very slow. In particular, contacts with the South Asian community have proven to be very challenging. Through their various efforts, project staff have identified several factors which appear to contribute to this situation; these include a preference for parents to keep their children with them, the inability of many parents to afford the cost of child care, prevalent misinformation among farm families that they are ineligible for the child care subsidy because they are self employed and/or because they are not in receipt of income assistance, and a reluctance on the part of many South Asian parents to put a child into a setting where there are no other South Asian children.

Although progress has been quite slow, the project has managed to increase services to the various ethnic communities in the area. For example, by the third year of the project's summer program, three families from the South Asian community had enrolled their children in summer child care. One of these families subsequently enrolled their children in family child care at the end of the summer program.

Over the course of the pilot period . . .

- the project has received 15 requests from parents wanting referrals to licensed or licence-not-required care that meets multicultural needs;
    - it has been able to accommodate 10 of the 15 requests;
- the project has recruited and/or identified 42 licensed and licence-not-required family child care providers to provide care responsive to multi-ethnic needs.

These results have come through the persistent efforts of project staff. Their work in providing translated materials, arranging for interpreters, making presentations, etc. has been supported by the word-of-mouth efforts of a parent whose children participated in the initial summer child care program. This parent has played an active role in telling her South Asian neighbours about the child care service, and in encouraging their involvement in a committee on child care issues.

Intended Outcome:	*an increased local, provincial and federal awareness of rural child care issues*

No specific measures are available to assess the extent to which the pilot project has had an impact on awareness of rural child care issues at local, provincial, and federal levels. However, the pilot project has initiated or participated in several activities intended to improve awareness of rural child care issues.

Extending the Rural Child Care Project office to serve as a child care resource centre for the South Okanagan area has played a key role in focusing more attention on child care issues at the local level. Previously, the Penticton CCRR provided resource and referral service for the whole area; however, parents wanting child care referrals, and caregivers wanting to attend workshops or borrow toys, equipment, or other resources were often reluctant to call long distance to Penticton, and/or to wait two weeks for the CCCRR worker to bring toys to the South Okanagan/Similkameen.

The Rural Child Care Project office in Osoyoos provides space for a full time CCRR worker, so that the CCRR can serve parents and caregivers on a local basis, rather than from Penticton. It also provides space for caregiver training, and participates with the CCRR in information, advertising and recruitment activities. This makes it easier to increase interest in child care issues, to attract prospective child care providers, and to provide caregiver training. The pilot project has also established a toy and equipment lending service, which is available to South Okanagan/Similkameen care providers through the CCRR worker based in the project office.

The project office is also used by an array of other community groups as a meeting place and to access phone, fax, message, and photocopying services for activities related to child care. For example, the office has served as a community resource for Licensing Officers, Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, the Community Action Program for Children, Supported Child Care Committee, Osoyoos Child Care Committee, Penticton and District Multicultural Services, etc.

Use of the Rural Child Care Project office as a child care resource centre has increased over the pilot period, in terms of frequency of use, number of users, and the purposes for which it is used. Project staff report that many parents, child care providers, other child care professionals, and community organizations in the South Okanagan/Similkameen region now turn to the project office for information on child care resources, subsidies, issues, careers in the child care field, and training for caregivers. Data compiled by project staff for the period ending September 1998 provide the following information on use of the Rural Child Care Project office as a community resource:

- Since the beginning of the pilot project period, the office has had a total of 622 contacts and requests for information on the Rural Child Care Project;
- Since February 1998,
    - 29 community groups and members have used the project office boardroom;
    - 49 community groups have used mail, message, fax, or photocopy services made available by the project;
    - 20 information/application packages for the child care subsidy have been given to local parents;
- Since April 1998, the project office has received 18 requests for research and informational resources.

Other activities of the Rural Child Care Project undertaken to improve local, provincial or federal awareness of child care issues include the following:

- presentations to and contacts with local organizations and officials to provide information about the pilot project and/or to request various forms of support; this includes contacts with the Mayor and Council of Osoyoos, Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Club, B.P.O. Elks, Okanagan Falls Parent Advisory Committee, Oliver and Osoyoos Child and Youth Committees, local schools and school board offices, Osoyoos Business and Community Development office, etc.
- outreach activities focusing on ethnic communities, as outlined previously;
- research into child care and family issues, compiling up to date information and data, and identifying child care resources to provide information for parents, caregivers, and others wanting to make informed child care choices;
- preparation and presentation of a media package on the Rural Child Care Project, for distribution by television, newspaper, and radio; preparation of information sheets for child care organizations and professionals; preparation of a 30 second television commercial on the pilot project;
- developed an information page on the Rural Child Care Project for inclusion as part of the Canadian Rural Information Service internet website;
- co-sponsored a two-day rural focused conference on parenting and child care issues; this was attended by approximately 60 child care providers, child care professionals, parents, etc., and another conference is planned for March 1999;
- contacts with individuals and organizations in other parts of Canada working on issues related to rural child care; this includes contacts with the Kids'n'Us Programs in rural Ontario, Child Care Visions program of Human Resources Development Canada, as well as the Ottawa Committee for Family Services Representatives.

Although no specific information is available on the outcomes of these efforts, it is clear that the project has undertaken activities which would support an increase in awareness of child care issues.

Intended Outcome:	*an increase of child care subsidy use in the region*

During development of the proposal which formed the basis for this project, it had been noted that the child care subsidy was problematic for migrant farm workers since they often did not have a fixed address needed to qualify for the subsidy. It also became apparent during the project that many resident farm families believed that self-employed workers were not eligible for the child care subsidy and/or that the subsidy was available only to income assistance recipients. These are both factors which would lead to under-utilization of the subsidy. In order to make child care as accessible and affordable as possible for workers who often earn minimum wage or fairly low incomes, the project attempted to increase use of the child care subsidy.

Steps taken to support increased use of the child care subsidy include the following:

- developing and distributing information about the subsidy, and about eligibility requirements;
- making copies of the subsidy package available at the project office; booking appointments with the Subsidy Officer in Oliver at parents' request;
- helping parents fill out subsidy application forms, making translation available when needed;

- clarifying eligibility of self-employed workers for the child care subsidy; through the Child Care Branch's Subsidy Consultant, it was determined that for subsidy purposes, income does not include assets, may be calculated net of expenses, and may be averaged over a whole year to provide a monthly income figure;
- making arrangements for migrant workers to have access to a temporary local address to satisfy eligibility requirements for the child care subsidy;
- attempting to provide better local access to the subsidy by meeting with subsidy staff from the Oliver office of the Ministry of Human Resources and offering use of the pilot project office one or two days each month so that parents could meet with subsidy staff locally rather than travelling to Oliver; this offer was refused since subsidy staff preferred to continue to meet clients in Oliver so that they can access clients' computer files.

The above steps are practical and important means of improving both awareness of and access to the child care subsidy. Although the project has attempted to obtain information from Ministry of Human Resources' offices about any changes in rate of subsidy use in the region, it has been unable to do so. As a result, no specific information is available to determine whether or not the various efforts of the pilot project have actually resulted in any change in the rate of child care subsidy use in the region.

Intended Outcome:	*a decreased use of income assistance during the months of July, August, September and October*

It had been anticipated that by improving parents' access to child care during peak work periods, the pilot project would be able to enhance parent's ability to obtain employment, thereby reducing reliance on income assistance. Project staff have anecdotal information indicating that many parents were able to be employed because they had access to reliable, quality child care.

Unfortunately, project staff were unable to obtain any actual data on use of income assistance in the region during the periods in question. As a result, no information is available on the actual impact the project may have had on use of income assistance.

Meeting the Needs of the Intended Client Group

The Rural Child Care Project was established to meet the needs of two primary client groups:

- migrant fruit pickers, many of whom are French Canadian, who move from one part of the South Okanagan/Similkameen to another to help with the harvesting as various fruit crops ripen;
- resident farm families who own or work on farms in the region, who have peak work periods during June to October, and who often have Punjabi, Hindi, or Portuguese as a home language.

Many of the pilot project's activities have been focused on serving these two client groups.

For migrant fruit pickers, the pilot project ensured that information on the pilot project and on its summer child care program was available in French. Information was posted in camp grounds and in other areas considered likely to be frequented by the migrant fruit pickers. The pilot project hired a French translator who also provided outreach to migrant Francophone workers. Through his efforts, it became apparent that transportation was a problem for this client group, and the pilot project made arrangements with a local bus company to provide transportation for families of the summer child care

program.

It has also become apparent during the pilot project that migrant workers coming into the area for fruit picking jobs are seldom accompanied by children. In the past, children had accompanied parents when they came to help with the harvest, but this had changed by the first year of the project. Relatively few migrant workers came at all that year, possibly due to a particularly poor harvest, and few if any required child care. The low numbers may also have been linked to the introduction of a three month residency requirement (since repealed) for income assistance. For whatever reason, very few migrant fruit pickers were accompanied by children during the pilot period, and as a result, there was little or no demand from this client group for child care.

For resident farm families, the pilot project has made information on the pilot project and on the summer child care program available in Punjabi, Hindi, and Spanish. It has also provided translation and interpretation services for parents wanting information or help on child care options, and on other issues including the provincial child care subsidy. As outlined previously, the project has made ongoing efforts to establish and maintain connections with the South Asian community, in order to clarify their child care needs, and to encourage wider use of child care as an alternative to taking children into orchards and fields. The project has also hired summer child care staff with South Asian and Spanish backgrounds. Although progress has been very slow, these efforts appear to be having an impact, as South Asian and Spanish communities increase their use of child care.

During the initial year of the pilot project, a survey was conducted of parents who had used the summer child care program. Although most parents completed the survey, the actual number of respondents is not high (14 out of 19 parents returned questionnaires). The information obtained through the parent survey provides the following profile of parents who used the project's summer child care during its first year:

Of the 14 responding parents . . .

- all reported that English was the language they used most often;
- all reported that they were Canadian citizens;
- all were female;
- 8 were married or in a common law relationship; 4 were separated or divorced; 2 were single;
- 10 were employed outside the home; six of these were working full time, 1 was seasonally employed, and 1 was working shifts;
- 3 were receiving income assistance; none were receiving employment insurance or Canada Pension Plan benefits;
- 8 provided information on income; of these, 7 were earning wages below Statistics Canada's low income cut-off point;
- 12 reported that they needed child care in order to attend work.

This would indicate that parents using the summer child care program during the pilot project's initial year generally did not include any significant representation of the various ethnic communities that migrate to or are resident in the region. This is consistent with the observation that few migrant workers were accompanied by children, and that the project initially had very little success connecting with the South Asian and Spanish communities in the area. The above profile information on income

levels does indicate that these parents were among the families for whom the project was attempting to make child care more affordable.

No further data are available on parents using pilot project services in subsequent years. However, project staff report a slow increase in the number of South Asian families using child care.

Project Design and Delivery

Various aspects of the Rural Child Care Project's *organizational structure* have revealed both strengths and weaknesses. The hub model adopted by the project's sponsoring agency, the Penticton and District Community Resources Society, has proven to be a strength for the project. The agency delivers a fairly large number of programs, many of which focus on services related to child care, to families, and to children. Each of the programs is linked to other related programs provided by the agency in various communities throughout the region. This enables the agency to make efficient use of resources, and at the same time provides a means by which each program can benefit from the experience and resources of others.

The pilot project was able to use toys, equipment and staff from the Penticton Teen Parent program, which is also delivered by the agency, and which is not operational during the summer months. The agency's involvement in an array of other child care related programs enabled it to identify qualified staff on relatively short notice for the summer child care centre. The pilot project makes some of its space available to other programs delivered by the agency (e.g. the CCRR) thereby making those programs more accessible to residents in the South Okanagan. Also, the agency's existing links within communities constitute potential sources of support for programs; for example, these links were helpful in identifying possible locations for the summer program, and in providing additional funding, food, fencing, and other supplies needed to operate the child care centre.

The project's function as child care resource centre for the region serves to strengthen the project while benefiting surrounding communities. By providing space and services for related organizations and activities, the pilot project is helping to make a wide array of services more accessible for those in the South Okanagan/Similkameen. It also enables the project to have easier access to information, services, and resources relevant to delivering child care in a rural environment and on a seasonal basis.

Staff turnover, although not a major concern, has had some weakening influences on the project. These influences are primarily in the area of variations in reporting of project data. The project has had three project coordinators, one of whom was in the position for less than two months. Somewhat different reporting formats have been utilized by the different coordinators, making it difficult to obtain consistent information on project indicators. This situation has been further complicated by changes introduced by the Ministry in reporting requirements related to evaluation information.

The *roles and responsibilities of project partners* appear to be clearly understood, and for the most part have been carried out in a cooperative manner. As noted earlier, the close, productive relationship between the pilot project and the Penticton based CCRR in effect serves to extend the CCRR into the South Okanagan. The pilot project also appears to have productive relationships with its sponsoring agency, and with other programs delivered by the agency. Although there are close links among these parties, each seems to have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities relating to their separate programs, and are able to rely on the support of the sponsoring agency and others when required.

The project has also worked cooperatively with community partners. It has successfully attracted the support (financial, material, and other) of individuals and organizations in the community when it needed help to keep the child care centre operating. It has worked closely with Licensing staff to ensure that the project's summer programs satisfied licensing requirements while meeting the needs of families for seasonal, extended-hour, and multi-age child care; this at times required extensive discussion within a very short time frame. It has worked with Building Inspection staff to utilize available resources so as to ensure that all reasonable measures were taken to provide child care in a safe environment.

The pilot project has been somewhat less successful in its attempts to obtain closer cooperation with Child Care Subsidy staff. Project staff had hoped to have Subsidy staff use the project office for appointments with parents from local communities. This proposed arrangement has not materialized, leaving project staff to provide other forms of support for parents wanting to apply for the subsidy.

A definite *challenge* for the pilot project has been the provision of a financially viable child care option appropriate to the needs of seasonally employed farm workers. To meet the needs of these workers, child care must be affordable, and available for extended hour days. In practical terms, this means that child care must be provided at a rate equivalent to the amount of the provincial child care subsidy. It very quickly became evident that whether delivered on a group basis or in a family child care environment, extended hour child care does not produce the revenue needed for a financially viable operation. The factors outlined below contribute to this situation.

- Food costs are higher for extended-hour child care; instead of the usual lunch and snacks, the pilot project provided three meals and two snacks a day for children in care for twelve hour days.
- When children are cared for in multi-age groupings (as was the case in the summer programs), licensing regulations require separate staffing, at the designated ratios, for infant/toddler, preschool, and school age children; this increases staffing costs.
- Employment Standards regulations limit staff to eight hour days; since child care was available on for twelve-hour days, this also increases staffing costs.
- The provincial child care subsidy rates are established for two time frames -- four hours or less, and more than four hours each day -- the amount paid is the same whether child care is provided for five hours or for twelve hours. Subsidies are also paid for a maximum of 20 days per month, even during those months with 21 or 22 week days. This means that although child care costs are higher when care is provided on an extended hour basis, the subsidy amount does not increase.

The inevitable result of this combination of factors was that the costs of providing extended hour child care could not be covered when rates were charged at the subsidy level. The pilot project did not exceed the subsidy level, since this would have reduced the accessibility and affordability of child care for low income families. Instead, . . .

- the project requested, and received some additional funding from the Ministry for Children and Families to cover part of the deficit incurred during the summer program;
- the project arranged for donations of food from local farmers and from the food bank; it also obtained donations of money and other supplies from community businesses and service organizations;

- the project established, with funding from the Ministry, a Family Child Care Supplement to pay $2.50 per hour to licensed family child care providers for child care beyond eight hours a day;
- the project requested a variance from Licensing officials to relax summer program staffing requirements to the level of family child care centres.

These measures allowed the project to cover the costs of providing the summer group child care program. It is important to recognize that in addition to these steps, the project kept its costs to a minimum by using low rent facilities, and borrowing toys, equipment, and other resources from the CCRR and from the Teen Parent Program. The establishment of a Family Child Care Supplement acknowledged additional costs incurred by families providing extended hour care, and also made it easier for the project to recruit family child care providers willing to offer child care for longer than eight hours a day.

The project faced another challenge in finding and retaining qualified staff for its group child care programs. As noted previously, the project's links with related programs made it easier to identify prospective staff. However, there are relatively few people with Early Childhood Education qualifications in the South Okanagan/Similkameen, and due to distance and a lack of distance education, the region does not have easy access to training in Early Childhood Education. Project staff noted that fewer than half of those applying for work in the Summer Child Care Centre had the proper credentials.

Retaining staff also proved difficult due to fluctuations in the number of children attending the child care centre. Attendance levels were subject to change on a daily basis, as parents' needs varied with weather, crop, and workload conditions, and as children were accepted on a drop in basis. This meant that the centre's staffing requirements varied, and that it was unable to establish fixed staff schedules or guarantee a specific number of hours of work. Under these circumstances, it was difficult to retain qualified employees, particularly in a region with a scarcity of trained Early Childhood Educators.

The project also found it challenging to connect with ethnic groups in the area, and in particular with the South Asian community. Although the project was established in part to address the needs of local ethnic communities, it initially had little success in attracting them to use the services of the Rural Child Care Project. As previously discussed, the project attempted to address this challenge by providing translation and interpretation services, seeking the advice of others serving similar client groups, persisting with outreach efforts, and hiring child care workers from the South Asian and Spanish communities. These efforts have slowly resulted in progress.

Obtaining criminal record checks for prospective caregivers proved to be sufficiently challenging that the project abandoned this approach as its primary child care delivery method. The project had initially intended to recruit and train family child care providers to deliver licensed family child care on an extended hour basis for seasonally employed workers. However, it encountered significant delays in obtaining responses to requests for criminal record checks for the prospective caregivers it had recruited. These delays were sufficiently lengthy (four months in some cases) that the required clearances were not obtained in time to allow the recruited caregivers to provide service during the summer. Although the project has attempted to obtain more timely service, it has continued to experience intermittent and unpredictable delays; as a result, it has turned to group child care as its primary method of service delivery.

With respect to *feedback processes*, the Rural Child Care Project has relied primarily on informal

methods. Some formal feedback was provided by the parent survey undertaken by the Ministry during the initial year of the pilot project. The CCRR also has formal feedback mechanisms which may provide some incidental information on the pilot project. For the most part, however, the project has relied on its informal contacts with parents, caregivers, and others.

Information reported by project staff indicates that the project has sought out and acted upon feedback relating to its services. For example, it has used information from parents, interpreters, and organizations serving multi-ethnic groups to determine reasons why members of local ethnic communities were not using child care services. Where barriers were identified (e.g. lack of transportation, preference for child care provided by South Asians), the project has taken steps to address those barriers (e.g. arranging for bus transportation, hiring South Asian staff).

Unintended Outcomes

The Rural Child Care Project has resulted in two types of outcomes which were not specifically intended when the project was initiated. One relates to the provision of child care for the tourism sector, and the other relates to the project's evolving function as a child care resource centre.

As part of its summer program, the project had occasion to provide child care for tourists who were on holiday in the area and wanted their child to participate in a program more appropriate to his age and interests. Since the South Okanagan/Similkameen is a popular tourist area, this experience indicates that a tourism oriented option might be developed as a component of a seasonal child care program.

The Rural Child Care Project office provides space and services for use by community organizations and members. This evolving function makes it easier for parents to access information on child care options, subsidies, and other issues, provides a local training site for caregiver training, enables local caregivers to more easily access toys and equipment from the project's lending service, and serves as a convenient location for parents, child care providers, and others having child care interests to meet, make appointments, and discuss related issues. The project has also established an information database to respond to requests for information on child care topics.

Regional Delivery Models

The Rural Child Care Project is one of twelve demonstration projects funded under the *Improved Access to Child Care* Strategic Initiative. These demonstration projects were intended to consolidate the delivery of child care services by extending the role of CCRRs and by creating umbrella organizations to manage services in a given community. Demonstration projects respond to local needs, while testing one or more of three specified aspects of service delivery. The Rural Child Care Project was designed to focus on issues related to the following aspects of service delivery:

- new and innovative ways of providing child care that provides local solutions to particular problems in a given community (e.g. the need for rural, seasonal, extended hours . . . child care).
- the integration and coordination of child care services in a given community, including but not limited to: local planning; development of new and/or satellite services to meet specific community needs; . . . purchasing caregiver and parent library resources and equipment lending; and, caregiver and parent training and workshops.

The summative evaluation framework identifies expected outcomes for regional delivery models and

community demonstration pilot projects. Not all of these outcomes will be relevant to every pilot project, since individual projects vary in nature and focus. Of the expected outcomes identified in the summative evaluation framework, the following three are of specific relevance to the Rural Child Care Project:

- expand and improve services in communities that are typically hard to serve
- improve the affordability of child care services for parents
- improve regional planning, development and delivery of child care

Improving Services in Hard to Serve Communities

The Rural Child Care Project was intended to provide service in situations which are typically hard to serve due to a need for extended hours of child care during seasonal periods. The specific area and client groups which were the focus of this pilot project are particularly difficult to serve because of the presence of additional barriers related to language, transience, and cultural factors. The pilot project was successful in improving services to address some, but not all of these factors.

The project succeeded in providing child care service for extended hours during peak summer harvesting periods. For three summers in Osoyoos, and for one summer in Oliver, the pilot project provided group child care for twelve hour days, five days a week, during July and August. Twenty child care spaces were made available on this basis for children from 0 to 12 years of age in Osoyoos during the first two years of the project, and in Oliver during the third year. As well, during the third year, the project was able to enter into a partnership agreement with the Osoyoos Child Care Centre to extend their hours of child care, number of spaces, and ages served.

The project put considerable effort into activities intended to address barriers related to transience, language, and cultural factors. It arranged for migratory workers to use the project office as a seasonal address to meet subsidy eligibility requirements. It translated information on the pilot project, and on child care into French, Punjabi, and Spanish, and distributed brochures and posters in locations likely to be frequented by migratory workers and members of local ethnic communities. It hired translators to provide interpretation and outreach services in various languages. It sought advice from other individual and organizations having experience delivering services in multicultural settings. The project has also hired child care staff with South Asian and Spanish backgrounds.

The ongoing attempts to connect with resident South Asian and Spanish populations have very slowly resulted in some increase in use of child care among these groups. Efforts focusing on migratory workers were less productive, but only because during the pilot project period there were few or no migratory workers who were accompanied by children, or who needed child care.

Improving Affordability

Affordability was a key aspect of the pilot project, since the seasonal workers who were the project's focus typically earn minimum wage or fairly low incomes. In order to keep the cost to parents as low as possible, the project provided group child care at the provincial child care subsidy rate, so that parents eligible for the full subsidy would have their child care costs covered. Most child care providers in the region charge rates 10% to 20% above the provincial subsidy level. The project also provided children attending the group centre for extended hour days with three meals and two snacks a day for $30 a month.

In addition to charging the provincial child care subsidy rate, the project also took steps to ensure that parents were aware of their eligibility for the subsidy, and knew how to apply for it. Copies of subsidy packages were distributed to parents through the project office. When needed, the project provided translation and other assistance to help parents fill out application forms. No specific data are available to determine whether the project had an impact on overall use of the child care subsidy in the region. However, most of the parents using the project's summer program were receiving the subsidy.

The rates charged for child care and for meals were very reasonable, particularly when compared with rates commonly charged for regular length child care days. When combined with the child care subsidy, this resulted in very affordable quality child care.

Improving Regional Planning/Development/Delivery

The improvement of regional planning, development and delivery of child care was not initially identified as an expected outcome for the pilot project. However, during the course of the pilot period, the project has gradually taken on more of a regional resource role in child care issues. As noted in earlier sections, the project office provides space for CCRR staff, supplies, and training. This represents a significant improvement over the previous situation in which the outreach worker from the Penticton based CCRR had to provide service in the South Okanagan from her car, making it difficult for caregivers and others to contact her. The current arrangements permit the agency to extend CCRR services to the area in a more meaningful manner. Parents, caregivers, and other professionals in the south benefit from this service enhancement.

The coordinator for the Rural Child Care Project is also a member of the South Okanagan Child Care Committee, which for the past five years has been responsible for regional level planning around child care issues. Her presence on this Committee provides a means by which rural perspectives may be reflected in regional child care planning processes.

The Rural Child Care Project office also provides space and services to other community members and organizations for activities related to child care issues. It has served as a meeting space for Licensing and Child Care Subsidy staff, for Supported Child Care and Community Action Program for Children committees, and for parents and caregivers wanting to meet with staff of these programs.

The project serves as a distribution point for child care information in the South Okanagan. It has compiled and identified articles, research material, and other resources on child care issues - particularly in rural settings. The project makes this information available to parents, caregivers, and others interested in specific aspects of child care issues.

With respect to cost efficiency of the project, the available information would indicate that the Rural Child Care Project made close and careful utilization of funds available to it. In order to keep costs low for parents, the project had to augment Strategic Initiative funds by borrowing toys, equipment and resources from other programs, and by seeking donations of funds and supplies from community businesses and service groups.

The experience of the Rural Child Care Project confirms that provision of child care on an extended hour basis is an expensive undertaking. The project has also identified systemic factors which contribute to the costs, and which constitute a barrier to adequate recognition of the additional expense of providing extended hour child care. Requirements stemming from Licensing and Employment Standards regulations have the effect of substantially increasing staffing costs for twelve hour child

care. At the same time, the provincial child care subsidy is not responsive to the additional costs incurred in providing child care beyond an eight hour day, or in fact beyond a five hour day. The combination of these factors means that affordable child care (i.e. at subsidy rates) cannot be provided on an extended hour basis without financial support from government or other sources.

Child Care Strategic Initiative

The *Improved Access to Child Care* Strategic Initiative is part of the joint federal/provincial Strategic Initiative Agreement. This Agreement has the general goal of moving people away from dependence on Canada's social security programs and on to employment and training. The *Improved Access to Child Care* initiative was established in the belief that quality child care is a key support to ensuring healthy development of children, and to improving workforce participation of their parents.

Specific objectives have been established for the *Improved Access to Child Care* Strategic Initiative. These are applicable to the wide array of projects eligible for funding under the Strategic Initiative, and not all objectives are relevant to all projects. Some have a specific focus on supported child care, or on regional management, while others are either general in nature, or are more relevant to community demonstration projects.

The *Improved Access to Child Care* Strategic Initiative objectives having specific relevance for the Rural Child Care Project are as follows:

- creating and supporting affordable, accessible and quality child care services enabling parents to take advantage of training and jobs to support their families;
- testing and evaluating delivery models to allow both Canada and British Columbia to explore new policy and program directions;
- developing regional management models to consolidate and stabilize the existing child care system;
- developing services and enhancing programs in a manner consistent with the overall direction for child care services in British Columbia, addressing at least one of the following core objectives:
    - to improve the stability and quality of facilities and services;
    - to increase affordability for parents;
    - to increase availability of service and promote parental choice in the selection of the most appropriate child care arrangements for their families.

Each of these four objectives is considered separately below. Discussion focuses on the extent to which the Rural Child Care Project has been successful in achieving each objective. Factors having an impact on the achievement of objectives have also been identified.

Affordable, Accessible Quality Child Care

Objective:	*creating and supporting affordable, accessible and quality child care services enabling parents to take advantage of training and jobs to support their families*

The Rural Child Care Project's primary contribution toward this objective is its provision of affordable child care in a format which enables parents to participate in seasonal employment opportunities. Its achievements with respect to this objective are outlined below.

- The project has provided a minimum of twenty child care spaces in July and August each year for three years.
- Child care provided through the project was available from 7a.m. to 7p.m. to accommodate the extended working day available during peak harvesting periods.
- Care was provided for children from 0 to 12 years of age, to enable sibling groups to participate in the same program.
- The rate charged for the summer child care program was set at the level of the provincial child care subsidy, so that parents qualifying for the full subsidy would have their child care costs covered.
- Project staff provided parents with information about the child care subsidy, with the required application forms, and when needed, with assistance in completing the forms.
- For children attending the summer child care program on an extended hour basis, the project provided three meals and two snacks a day for $30 per month.
- Child care was provided by fully qualified and experienced Early Childhood Educators and trained assistants.
- The project translated information about the summer child care program into several languages, and distributed the information in locations likely to be frequented by migratory and resident farm workers.

Each of these achievements supports the delivery of quality child care which is affordable, accessible, and appropriate to the needs of seasonally employed farm workers.

Little direct information is available on the extent to which the project's efforts have enabled parents to take advantage of training and jobs to support their families.

A parent survey undertaken during the first year of the project indicated that of the 14 parents responding to the survey . . .

- 11 reported that they needed child care in order to attend work;
- 5 had previously been on income assistance, and had entered the work force that year to take advantage of seasonal employment;
- 3 of the 5 parents who had previously been on income assistance returned to receiving income assistance when the child care centre closed at the end of the summer;
- 1 parent was very dissatisfied with the project's child care service because it was not available on weekends to enable her to take advantage of weekend work.

Anecdotal information provided by project staff indicates that several parents reported that the summer child care program enabled them to take advantage of seasonal employment for the first time since their children were born. Others reported that they had been seasonally employed during previous summers, but had taken their children into the fields or orchards with them.

No direct information is available on the impact the project may have had on parent's employment situations during subsequent years of the pilot. Anecdotal information supplied by project staff continues to confirm parent reports that the project was instrumental in enabling them to take advantage of seasonal work opportunities.

Even in the absence of more concrete data, it would appear reasonable to conclude that the provision of child care at an affordable rate, during peak harvesting periods, and for extended hours each day, would enable parents to take advantage of seasonal work opportunities. Using child care instead of taking the child to the field or orchard not only results in a much safer situation for the child, but also enables the parent to be a more productive employee. This benefits not only the employer, but also the employee's earning capacity.

Delivery Models to Explore New Directions

Objective:	*testing and evaluating delivery models to allow both Canada and BC to explore new policy and program directions*

The Rural Child Care Project provided a means of testing and evaluating the delivery of child care designed to meet the specific needs of farm workers during peak harvesting seasons. It also facilitated testing and evaluating the delivery of this form of child care in a rural, multi-ethnic setting. Its experience provides useful information for others interested in pursuing similar approaches.

Financial Viability of Delivery Model:

The Rural Child Care Project was able to provide extended hours of quality child care to meet farm workers' needs during peak harvesting periods. However, the project's experience indicates that delivery of child care service on an extended hour basis will not be financially viable when provided at current provincial child care subsidy levels.

From the project's perspective, it was important that the service be affordable for the low income families it was intended to benefit. This necessitates linking rates charged to the child care subsidy rate. It was also important that the child care be provided for extended hours to enable parents to take advantage of long work hours available during peak harvesting periods. However, as outlined earlier, the provincial child care subsidy is not currently structured to adequately recognize the additional expenses associated with providing child care on an extended hour basis.

The project was able to utilize the resources of other programs, and to arrange for donations of money, food, supplies and time. Additional funding was also obtained from the Ministry. These measures enabled the project to provide the service without causing undue financial hardship for its sponsoring agency. However, its experience leads to the conclusion that supplementary resources will be required if care is provided at subsidy levels.

Licensing Requirements and Multi-Age Groupings:

In order to keep sibling groups together, and to establish a single centre to which parents could take their children, the pilot project provided child care for children from birth to twelve years of age. From a licensing perspective, this range incorporates three age groups. Licensing also establishes separate staffing requirements for each age group, and the project found those requirements to be problematic.

The difficulty again stems from the need to provide service on an extended hour basis. As noted in an earlier section, the need to meet separate staffing ratios and qualifications for each age group, when combined with Employment Standards regulations limiting staff to eight hour

work days, results in significantly increased staffing costs for extended hour child care.

The pilot project found that there were precedents for arranging a licensing variance to allow multi-age grouping of children following the ratio for family child care centres. This flexibility is needed to help control staffing costs.

Short Term Access to Resources:

The pilot project's child care centre was only operational during July and August, which are key periods of the harvesting season. Rather than acquire toys, equipment, and other resources dedicated to this specific two month period, the project arranged to borrow materials from a Teen Parent Program (which closes during the summer) and from the CCRR. The project has also acquired some resources of its own, and it makes these available through the CCRR during the other ten months of the year. Having short term access to the resources of other programs enriches the range of toys, equipment, and materials available to the summer program, and enables it to operate on a more limited budget.

Development of Regional Management Models

Objective:	*developing regional management models which will consolidate and stabilize the existing child care system*

The Rural Child Care Project was not initially established with the intent of developing a regional management model. However, it has gradually assumed this role as it identified service gaps and ways of addressing those gaps. It currently provides space and support to extend CCRR services into the South Okanagan/Similkameen. It also makes space and services available to a range of community groups, committees, and provincial and federal government representatives involved in activities related to child care issues. It supports parents in their contacts with government officials, through the provision of information, arranging appointments, helping with applications, etc. The project has developed an information base on child care issues, which can be used to respond to individual requests for information, or for community, program, or regional planning purposes. Over the pilot period, the project has gradually increased its role as a regional resource centre for child care issues. Project staff report that this role increases awareness of child care issues in the region, and responds to local needs for an increased presence of child care professionals.

The project has not made as much progress as it would have liked in encouraging more involvement on the part of Child Care Subsidy staff. Its offer of space to accommodate meetings with clients was declined, since Subsidy staff need access to their computers for client information. The project has, however, distributed subsidy packages to parents, has assisted them in completing applications, and has helped them arrange appointments.

Services & Programs Consistent with Core Objectives

Objective:	*developing services and enhancing programs in a manner consistent with the overall direction for child care services in BC, addressing at least one of the following core objectives:* • *to improve the stability and quality of facilities and services;* • *to increase affordability for parents;* • *to increase availability of service and promote parental choice in selecting the most appropriate child care arrangements for their families.*

The Rural Child Care Project has developed services and enhanced programs in a manner which is consistent with two of the identified core objectives: increasing affordability of child care for parents; and increasing availability of service and promoting parental choice in selecting child care appropriate to families' needs.

Its development of a child care service to be delivered at rates equivalent to provincial child care subsidy levels is consistent with the objective of increasing affordability for parents. Similarly, its provision of very low cost meals for children, and its efforts in encouraging and assisting parents to apply for the provincial child care subsidy, address the issue of affordability.

Other project activities have focused more on the objective of increasing availability of service and promoting parental choice in selecting child care appropriate to families' needs. These are outlined below.

- The provision of short term, extended hour child care provides a needed option for parents who work long hours during peak harvesting seasons.
- The translation of child care information into the languages used in local ethnic communities, making interpretation and translation services available to parents on child care issues, and hiring child care staff from local ethnic communities supports the provision of culturally sensitive child care service which is more likely to be appropriate to families' needs.
- The project's support for the recruitment and training of family child care providers helps to increase the range of child care options available to families who might prefer a family setting over group child care.

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Discussion

This section discusses various aspects of the Rural Child Care Project having implications for those who may be interested in implementing similar services in their communities. The section presents an outline of lessons learned from the pilot project, identifies the successes and challenges encountered, describes the qualities of the project model, and discusses the conditions which appear to support success.

What Has Been Learned

The experience of the Rural Child Care Project has demonstrated that a short term, extended hour child care service can be delivered in a manner which provides safe quality care for children while meeting the needs of seasonal farm workers. The project makes it equally clear that this service is not financially viable when rates equivalent to the provincial child care subsidy are charged. The project has also provided an opportunity to reassess some of the assumptions made about providing child care in a multicultural environment.

Child Care to Meet Seasonal Workers' Needs

Migrant fruit pickers and resident farm families in the South Okanagan/ Similkameen work long hours each day during peak summer periods to harvest the various crops that ripen during June to October. Actual work schedules vary with weather and crop conditions, and the demand for workers fluctuates in different parts of the region and as different crops are ready for harvest. In order to take advantage of these changing employment opportunities, seasonal workers need flexible child care that is provided on a short term, extended hour basis, at affordable rates, and close to locations where work is available.

The Rural Child Care Project was able to meet most of these needs. It provided child care for twelve hour days, five days a week, during July and August. The summer program was delivered in Osoyoos, and during one summer in Oliver, locations which are close to many of the area's farms and orchards. The project also made arrangements to assist any families for whom transportation to the child care centre was a barrier. Family groupings of children from birth to age 12 were accepted, so that siblings could remain together. Child care was delivered by qualified and experienced staff.

For children, the summer program provided an opportunity to participate in developmentally appropriate, positive experiences in a safe healthy environment. In many cases, without the alternative of a summer child care program, children would have accompanied their parents to fields and orchards, settings which are often very hazardous for children.

The summer child care program enabled parents to take advantage of extended hour work opportunities during peak harvesting periods. The child care was also very affordable for parents; the rates charged were equivalent to the provincial child care subsidy so that those eligible for the full subsidy would have their child care costs covered.

The Rural Child Care Project was unable to meet seasonal workers' needs for child care on week-ends, nor during the longer harvesting period which starts earlier in the year and extends into September and October. Anecdotal information indicates that although the Monday to Friday, July and August program met child care needs during key periods, the project would have been more helpful if it had been available all week and during a longer harvesting period. However, this was not possible within the budget and supplementary sources of support available to the project.

Financial Viability of Model

The experience of the Rural Child Care Project indicates that provision of short term, extended hour child care is not a financially viable endeavour with rates charged at the level of the provincial child care subsidy.

As outlined in previous sections, staffing costs are higher for extended hour child care, particularly when using multi-age groupings. This results not only from the need to provide longer hours of

service, but also from the need to meet Licensing and Employment Standards requirements relating to staffing qualifications and ratios, and standard work day lengths. Food costs are higher because children who are in child care for twelve hours a day need additional meals beyond the usual lunch and snacks. The provision of a short term child care program (e.g. July and August) would usually also result in additional costs for the acquisition of toys, equipment and other resources which would not be needed during other parts of the year.

Establishing rates at child care subsidy levels improves affordability for parents, but does not recognize the additional costs incurred to provide extended hours of care. Moreover, as currently structured, the child care subsidy cannot adequately recognize those additional costs. The current rate structure provides two levels of payment: one for child care for four hours or less each day, and one for child care for more than four hours. Care provided for twelve hours is reimbursed at the same rate as care provided for five hours. Similarly, the child care subsidy is available for a maximum of twenty days per month, even in those months when there are 21 or 22 week days during which child care is provided.

The pilot project was able to provide group child care on an extended hour basis during three summers because it supplemented income from child care subsidies with additional funding from the Ministry, and with donations of funds, food, and other materials from local businesses and community organizations. It was also able to borrow toys and equipment from other programs.

The experience of the pilot project is that at current subsidy levels, short term, extended hour child care will need to be supplemented by funding from other sources.

Addressing Multicultural Child Care Needs

The Rural Child Care Project's intended client groups included migrant and resident farm workers from a range of different ethnic backgrounds. In attempting to address the needs of these clients, the pilot project has acquired information and experience which may assist others.

The project was established on the assumption that the migrant and primarily French Canadian fruit pickers who come into the area to help with the summer harvest would need child care to enable them to take advantage of work opportunities. Actual experience indicates that few of the migrant fruit pickers were accompanied by children, and few or none needed child care. Apparently children had accompanied their parents on harvesting trips during previous years, but the practice had been largely discontinued.

The project had also anticipated meeting the child care needs of resident South Asian and Portuguese farm workers in the area. Information on the summer child care program and on the child care subsidy was made available in several languages to ensure that farm families were aware that they now had an alternative to keeping their children with them while they worked in the fields.

However, connections with this client group proved to be more difficult than anticipated. In its various efforts to provide translation, outreach, and other services, the project was able to determine that South Asian families preferred to have their children cared for by extended family members, or in South Asian family child care settings, or in child care facilities attended by other South Asian children. It was also determined that cost is a key consideration and that many of these families felt they were not eligible for the child care subsidy, either because they were self-employed, or because they were not on income assistance.

Through persistent and ongoing contacts, the project has managed to slowly increase farm families' use of child care. Its experience indicates that consistent outreach efforts are necessary, that word of mouth support is helpful, and that families may be more receptive if the child care program employs staff from the same ethnic community.

Successes and Challenges

The Rural Child Care Project has encountered both successes and challenges during its pilot period. Prime among its successes are its provision of affordable child care appropriate to clients' needs, the delivery of quality care in an environment which was much safer than the alternative, and the growing role of the project as a regional resource on child care issues.

Challenges encountered by the pilot project relate to delays in obtaining responses to requests for criminal record checks, limited access to trained, qualified staff, problems accessing provincial child care subsidy services, and difficulties connecting with the South Asian community.

Affordable Child Care

The project has been successful in its efforts to provide child care which not only meets the needs of seasonal workers, but which is affordable for parents who typically earn fairly low incomes. Child care was provided at the provincial child care subsidy rate, and children received three meals and two snacks a day for $30 a month. The pilot project took steps to ensure that parents were aware of their eligibility for the provincial child care subsidy; it also distributed subsidy application packages to parents, provided translation service, and helped them complete applications or make appointments with subsidy staff. As a result, most parents using the summer child care program received the child care subsidy, which made the service very affordable.

Safe, Quality Child Care

The project was also successful in providing quality child care delivered by qualified and experienced child care staff. Although there is a general scarcity of trained and qualified Early Childhood Educators in the region, the project has managed to find, and for the most part retain, child care staff with qualifications appropriate to the project and to requirements established in Licensing regulations.

For many children, their alternative to the summer child care program was to accompany their parents to fields and orchards which can be very hazardous for children. The importance of making extended hour child care available to seasonal workers was brought home in 1998 when a child who accompanied her mother to the work site fell into a fruit sorting conveyor belt and had her thumb severed.

Role as Regional Child Care Resource

During the course of the pilot period, the project has gradually assumed an additional role as a regional resource on child care issues. It has enabled the Penticton based CCRR to more effectively serve the South Okanagan/Similkameen region by providing space for a full time CCRR worker, by making its toy and equipment lending library available to the CCRR worker for use by local care providers, and by providing training space so that area residents can participate in caregiver training on a local basis.

The project also makes space and services available to a wide range of community members and

organizations, child care professionals, and representatives of various levels of government. It serves as a centre for regional discussions of child care issues, and for meetings of parents, caregivers, and other professionals on matters relating to child care.

The Rural Child Care Project has made concerted efforts to compile an information base of research articles, resources and other materials related to child care. The provision of child care for farm workers, and in rural settings has been an important focus of these efforts. Development of this information base enables the project to more effectively respond to requests from parents, caregivers and others interested in specific aspects of child care. It also provides material which would be helpful for regional child care planning activities.

Criminal Records Checks

The project's experience with criminal record checks has proven to be somewhat challenging. During its first year of operation, the project attempted to recruit family child care providers to meet seasonal workers' child care needs. Although its recruitment efforts were fairly successful, the project was forced to abandon this approach when it encountered significant delays in obtaining responses to requests for criminal record checks. Without this clearance, the recruited caregivers could not provide the required child care, and many subsequently lost interest in the project. Some of the requested clearances were not returned until the fall of that year.

Although the project has since relied primarily on group child care, it has a need for criminal record checks when hiring staff for its summer programs. Response times to its requests have varied considerably, and the project continues to experience intermittent delays. Staff attempts to address these difficulties have resulted in improvement in individual situations; however unexplained delays continue to occur.

Limited Access to Qualified Staff

Finding qualified staff for its summer child care program has proved to be challenging for the Rural Child Care Project. It has been fortunate in having access to staff from another program which does not operate during the summer. While the project has always been able to hire the required number of staff with appropriate qualifications, it has often had to put considerable effort into identifying staff who not only have the required training and experience, but who are also willing to work in a situation where it is often difficult to predict work schedules and staffing requirements. In an area characterized by a scarcity of trained child care professionals, the project has found it challenging to retain qualified staff in circumstances of fluctuating staffing requirements.

In its hiring efforts, the project has received applications from many individuals who are interested in child care work, but who do not possess required credentials. Project staff note that this situation is unlikely to improve, since the region does not have ready access to Early Childhood Educator training. The project has worked with the CCRR to extend caregiver training to interested individuals in the area, and has benefited from the CCRR's efforts by hiring some of the caregivers completing the CCRR training.

Child Care Subsidy Services

Although the pilot project has been involved in many activities intended to expand use of the provincial child care subsidy, it has not been able to convince staff of the Child Care Subsidy office to

use the facilities of the Rural Child Care Project to meet clients and process subsidy applications. Project staff had hoped that parents' access to subsidy information and staff would be improved if staff were available at the project office on at least a full time basis.

This would enable parents to avoid long distance phone calls to schedule appointments, and trips to Oliver to meet with subsidy staff. It would also extent the range of child care services available to parents, caregivers, and others in the region. However, the offer of space and support has been declined, since subsidy staff need to use computers at their own office in order to access client records.

Connecting with South Asian Community

Many of the resident farm workers in the region are of South Asian background, and rely primarily on Punjabi or Hindi as their home language. The project attempted to improve access to child care services for this client group by translating information on the project and on child care issues into these languages, and by offering interpretation services through the project office. Project staff have also met with others who have experience with child care issues in a South Asian or a multicultural setting, in an attempt to more clearly identify and address child care needs of this client group. However, the project has found it very challenging to make effective connection with the resident South Asian community.

Through a combination of efforts, the project has managed to make slow progress in encouraging increased use of child care among South Asian families. Ongoing outreach efforts, informal contacts through other parents, and the hiring of staff from the community appear to be helpful. However, the project's experience is that it may take considerably more time and effort than anticipated to effectively address the child care needs of South Asian farm families.

Qualities Describing the Project Model

The introductory section of this report is a project overview which includes a description of the project model. In summary, the Rural Child Care Project provided group child care for twelve hours a day, five days a week, during July and August, at provincial child care subsidy rates. This was intended to meet the needs of migrant and resident farm workers who often work long hours each day during peak harvesting periods.

This was achieved through the resourceful and persistent efforts of project and agency staff. They approached project tasks in a flexible manner, and drew on their knowledge of community and regional resources to obtain a wide range of support for the project.

The hub model employed by the sponsoring agency also played a key role in assisting the project to achieve its objectives. The Penticton and District Community Resources Society has adopted a hub model to facilitate delivery of its various programs and services, many of which are related to child care and family issues. As part of this hub, the pilot project was able to benefit not only from the experience of other related programs, but also by being able to borrow resources needed to operate its summer child care program. The project used the toys and equipment of the Teen Parent Program (also delivered by Penticton and District Community Resources Society). Since the Teen Parent Program does not operate during the summer months, the pilot project's use of its toys and equipment represents an effective utilization of resources. The pilot project was also able to employ staff from the Teen Parent Program in the summer child care centre.

The project's incorporation into the sponsoring agency's hub model not only results in effective utilization of resources, it has also provided the project with a readily available source of information, experience, and advice on a wide range of child care and operational issues.

The Rural Child Care Project is in turn serving as a hub for child care issues within the South Okanagan/Similkameen area. As noted in previous sections, it provides space, services and information to support various community groups, individuals and professionals involved in a wide range of child care issues.

Conditions Contributing to Success

Experience acquired through the Rural Child Care Project leads to the identification of several conditions which contribute to the success of the project. Prime among these is the need for flexibility in the application of Licensing regulations for short term child care programs. The need for additional sources of financial support to facilitate the provision of affordable extended hour child care has also been identified as a key requirement. Persistent and ongoing outreach activities have also been shown to be helpful in establishing connections with farm families from local ethnic communities.

Licensing Flexibility

The pilot project was only able to provide its summer child care program with the cooperation of Licensing Officers. Project staff worked closely with Licensing Officers to ensure that they had a full appreciation of the project's objectives and parameters, and also to ensure that the child care centre would meet Licensing requirements.

Several requirements were difficult to meet within the limited budget, time frame, and resources available to the project. Specifications relating to numbers of washrooms, and requirements pertaining to staffing levels and qualifications for multi-age groupings posed potential problems for the pilot project. However, Licensing Officers were cooperative and supportive; applications were processed quickly and arrangements were made for variances to meet both the intent of Licensing regulations and the project's parameters. The joint efforts of Licensing and project staff were necessary conditions for the successful establishment of the summer child care program.

Supplementary Financial Support

The project's experience indicates that supplementary financial support is necessary if extended hour child care is to be provided at provincial child care subsidy levels. The current rate structure for the provincial child care subsidy does not adequately recognize the considerably higher costs associated with the provision of child care on an extended hour basis. At the same time, keeping child care charges at the provincial subsidy level is essential if the service is to be affordable for families with low incomes typical of those involved in seasonal farm work. The combination of these factors means that in order to successfully provide child care which meets the needs of seasonal farm workers, it will be necessary to arrange for supplementary sources of funding to cover the additional expenses associated with extended hour care.

In the case of the Rural Child Care Project, the introduction of a Family Child Care Supplement proved useful as an incentive to encourage family child care providers to offer extended hours of care for seasonal workers. The additional $2.50 per hour for each hour beyond eight hours of child care, which better reflects the costs of providing this form of care, also contributes to the success of the

project.

Persistent Outreach Activity

The experience of the Rural Child Care Project also indicates that in order to successfully connect with members of local ethnic communities, persistent outreach activity will be required. In its efforts to effectively extend services to the local South Asian community, the pilot project employed a combination of translation, interpretation, and outreach services, informal contacts, and use of child care staff from the local community. These efforts have resulted in some increase in the use of child care services among South Asian farm families. It has been the project's experience that progress in this area is slow, and requires persistent and ongoing effort.